



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE NAVAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE SOUTHERN STATES DURING THE REVOLUTION.

THE history of our Revolutionary struggle on the land has been much more thoroughly worked out than on the ocean, although quite as many battles, to as much purpose, were fought at sea as on shore. Nor has there been made a very complete investigation into the organization and executive work which the management of the Revolution necessitated on the part of either the individual States or the federal government, although surely here were laid the foundations of the executive machinery set up by Hamilton under the constitution. This study, which deals with a phase of state administration and of naval history, has to do, therefore, with an imperfectly explored field.<sup>1</sup>

The American armed vessels of the Revolution sailed under either private, State, or Continental auspices. In numbers and achievements the privateers greatly outclassed the combined Continental and State fleets; and similarly, the Continental fleet outclassed that of any one State. Disregarding galleys, boats, and barges, all of which were much used for coast defenses, and counting only the sailing vessels, it will not be far out of the way to say that throughout the

---

<sup>1</sup>The basis of this paper originally formed a part of a larger one on the naval administration of the thirteen original States, which was prepared for a seminar on the constitutional history of the American Revolution, conducted by Prof. Jameson at the University of Chicago. It is chiefly based on the following sources: Force, "American Archives," Fourth Series, IV. and V.; Fifth Series, I., II., and III. Winsor, "Narrative and Critical History," VI. Hale, "United States Navy." Maclay, "History of United States Navy," I. Manuscripts, State Department, Washington, D. C. Maryland Archives, XI., XII., XVI., XVIII., and XXI. Hanson, "Laws of Maryland." Hening, "Statutes of Virginia," IX., X., and XI. Virginia, "Calendar of State Papers," I. North Carolina, Colonial Records XI. and XII. Cooper, "Statutes of South Carolina," IV. McCrady, "South Carolina in the Revolution." Stevens, "History of Georgia," II. Jones, "History of Georgia," I.

war, at one time or another, the combined fleet of the States numbered seventy-five vessels; and the Continental navy, forty. The number of privateers is more difficult to determine. Dr. Hale thinks there were more than six hundred in Massachusetts alone, and another authority places the largest number in all the States for any one year at four hundred and fifty.

Since all the thirteen original States were exposed to attacks by sea from the British, it was to be expected that they would attempt a naval defense by means of armed vessels. State separateness, and the absence of a strong federal government, insured that such attempts would be made, in part at least, through State endeavors. By the end of 1775 nine States had taken steps toward procuring armed vessels, Rhode Island moving first, June 12, 1775, and by March, 1776, Maryland had obtained and equipped a small cruiser. Only three States were too poor and small to undertake a naval defense—New Jersey, Delaware, and New Hampshire.

Ten States, then, at one time or another during the Revolution, had navies, if we may dignify a small collection of armed sailing craft and rowboats by that name; for only in the fleets of Massachusetts and South Carolina do we find vessels of the frigate type, and here but one or two in each State. The navies of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina were largest and did best service, Massachusetts leading in numbers with thirty-four vessels; those of Rhode Island, Georgia, and North Carolina were of least force.

There was not a little confusion in the naval affairs of the Revolutionary period, for executive business had not as yet been nicely discriminated from the legislative, and nowhere had official routine become fixed and certain. In general, however, before the adoption of the State constitutions, which took place for the most part in 1776, the business of the navy in each State was administered by its Committee or Council of Safety; and after the adoption of its constitution, by its Governor and Council. Where the differentiation of functions went so far, these executive bodies were relieved of

routine duties by a specially created board, committee, or officer—most frequently a board. Six States (Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) developed such an administrative organ. It is to be noted that three of these States are Southern; the other two Southern States, Maryland and Georgia, stopped short of this development.

Coming now to a consideration of the navies in each of the Southern States, we shall begin with Maryland. The first, largest, and most serviceable vessel owned by this State was the ship *Defense*, mounting twenty-two six-pounders. She was purchased and fitted out in the winter and early spring of 1776 by the Council of Safety, assisted by the Baltimore Committee of Observation. The first captain of the *Defense* was James Nicholson, who later was called to the Continental navy and became its ranking officer, serving from 1777 to 1783, a distinction which he attained not without strong suspicions of political pull or the displacement of other officers whose jealousies he incurred. Nicholson before his promotion retook, in Chesapeake Bay, March, 1776, several prizes captured by the British sloop of war *Otter*. The *Defense*, under the command of Capt. George Cooke, on a very successful cruise off the coast of the Southern States, lasting from September 24 to December 1, 1776, captured a scow, bound from the Bay of Honduras to Cork, loaded with mahogany and logwood, an empty sloop, and a West Indian schooner freighted with rum, sugar, coffee, and fruits. The *Defense* was ordered to be sold in July, 1778.

On June 25, 1776, the Maryland convention authorized the Council of Safety to build seven row galleys, and on July 3 to construct three vessels carrying not more than three guns each, and also a number of armed boats not exceeding six. By 1778, besides the ship *Defense*, Maryland had armed and equipped as light cruisers the xebec *Johnson*, two sloops, the *Resolution* and the *Molly*, and two brigs, the *Friendship* and the *Amelia*, together with five galleys. In the summer of 1778 all these vessels were sold with the exception of two galleys, probably because of the impossibility

of fitting them out, owing to the lack of seamen and naval stores; then, too, the scene of war having shifted from the Middle States, the need of defense did not seem so imminent.

In the meantime, March 22, 1777, the Council of Safety had been succeeded by the Governor and Council, who administered naval affairs until the close of the Revolution. Not much was doing in a naval way in Maryland from the summer of 1778 till the fall of 1780, when the serious depredations of British refugee barges and privateers upon the commerce of Baltimore and the inhabitants of the State's exposed coasts caused the General Assembly to authorize the Governor and Council to purchase four barges, one galley, and one sloop or schooner. A supplementary act in May, 1781, provided for two more galleys and for additional barges; and an act of May, 1782, called for four more barges, and appointed an "honorable ambassador or agent to repair to the capital of Virginia" and secure, if possible, the co-operation of that State in protecting the trade of the Chesapeake. Under these acts the Governor and Council obtained ten barges, several galleys, and a schooner, probably the Flying Fish. A ship was also placed on the stocks. The barges were about forty-two feet long, eight feet wide, and three feet deep, drawing fifteen inches of water. They were propelled by oars and sails and were armed with two large guns, and carried at least twenty-five men. The galleys drew about eight feet of water. These vessels, although greatly handicapped by lack of proper equipment, contended bravely with the superior force of the enemy till the cessation of hostilities, in May, 1783. On March 21, 1783, a State fleet took, with large plunder, a rendezvous of the British privateers on Devil's Island, in Chesapeake Bay.

Georgia's navy was small and unimportant. Her Provincial Congress was, however, one of the first to commission a vessel, July, 1775, and its taking of a ship loaded with powder July 10 was one of the most timely captures made during the war—five thousand pounds of powder going to the Continental Congress upon its earnest solicitations. The Council of Safety organized the State's provincial marine.

It sent Capt. Bowen to Cape François, West Indies, to purchase armed vessels, arms, and warlike stores, and ordered Capt. Pray, October, 1776, to St. Thomas on a similar errand, Capt. Pray being empowered to mount on the vessel carrying his cargo to Georgia as many guns as she would conveniently bear. In February, 1777, the Council of Safety conferred almost the whole executive power of the State upon its President, and in May both Council and President were succeeded by the Governor and Executive Council under the new constitution.

Four galleys were obtained, which, under the command of Commodore Bowen, were quite active in the defense of the exposed harbors of the State and in the transportation of troops. Under orders of President Gwinnett, they took part in an unsuccessful expedition against East Florida in May, 1777; and in a gallant exploit off Frederica, Ga., April, 1778, they captured the British brigantine, Hinchinbrooke, a sloop, and a brig. In the campaign around Savannah in the winter of 1778-79 two of the galleys were burned to prevent their being taken; and in March, 1779, the remaining two were lost to the British. The occupation of Southern Georgia by the enemy from this time on seems to have stopped further naval endeavors on the part of the State.

Virginia had a more varied experience in naval administration than any other State. Her armed sailing craft in numbers and armament was surpassed by Massachusetts alone, and her interest in naval matters extended over a longer period of time than did that of any other State. Her first step was taken when in December, 1775, the Provincial Convention ordered the Committee of Safety "to provide from time to time such and so many armed vessels as they may judge necessary for the protection of the several rivers in this colony."

In June, 1776, the Governor and Privy Council under the new constitution succeeded the Council of Safety in the management of the navy. But in the meantime, in May, 1776, naval affairs demanding a special executive organ, the Convention of Virginia appointed a Board of Naval Commis-

sioners consisting of five members, which was authorized to elect from its membership a presiding officer to be called the First Commissioner of the Navy, and to appoint a clerk and such other assistants as it should deem necessary. A majority of the board constituted a quorum. In general its business was to "superintend and direct all matters and things to the navy pertaining." It had charge of the building, fitting, arming, and provisioning of the navy, the keeping of its accounts and the paying of its debts. The board was ordered to inform itself through the reports of the officers of the state of the navy and to keep the Legislature informed thereto. It could remove officers for misconduct, but could not appoint them; it could only recommend proper persons to the Governor and Council. The board was charged with the care and direction of the naval storehouse on Potomack Creek, and of the State shipyard, probably located on the site of the present United States navy yard at Portsmouth, Va. Each commissioner was paid twenty shillings a day when employed, which sum, on the depreciation of the currency, was doubled in October, 1778.

In May, 1779, the functions hitherto exercised by the Board of Naval Commissioners were vested in the newly created Boards of Trade and of War. To the Board of War fell all strictly naval duties, which descended to a single naval commissioner appointed by this board. In October, 1779, Virginia's navy comprised five ships (the *Tartar*, *Dragon*, *Thetis*, *Gloucester*, and the *Tempest*), the brig *Jefferson*, eight galleys, and two boats; and the General Assembly now reduced this fleet to one ship, one brig, two galleys, and two boats, probably because of the impossibility of equipping the vessels, owing to a lack of money, men, and naval stores.

Virginia's executive commissions having proved expensive and cumbersome, her Legislature, in May, 1780, abolished the Boards of War and of Trade, and authorized the Governor, with the consent of his Council, to appoint a Commissioner of War, a Commercial Agent, and, coördinate with these two, a Commissioner of the Navy. The salary of the

Commissioner of the Navy was fixed at thirty thousand pounds of tobacco a year, and that of his clerk at ten thousand pounds. He was to "be under the controul and direction of the Governour and Council." Thomas Jefferson was Governor at this time, and supervised the navy quite closely, for the most part himself determining the service of the vessels. In the winter of 1780-81, James Maxwell, a somewhat illiterate officer, was Commissioner.

As an act of economy, in November, 1781, almost all the officers of the navy, including the Commissioner of the Navy, chaplains, surgeons, and paymasters, were dismissed, and the conduct of naval affairs fell to the State Executive.

British depredations on the trade and inhabitants of Virginia caused her, in the years 1780, 1781, and 1782, to make important increases in her naval forces. Nine small cruisers were added, and possibly more. During the period from October, 1780, to May, 1782, the General Assembly ordered eight galleys and two barges to be built. In April, 1781, the Commissioner of the Navy reported seventy-eight men on seven vessels, whose full complement was five hundred and twelve men. In order to secure recruits, the General Assembly increased the pay of sailors, gave the whole of a captured prize to its captors, and authorized the impressment of seamen, but all to no purpose. The deficiency in men and equipment throughout the Revolution greatly crippled the navies of the States as well as those of the Federal government, frequently to the extent of paralyzing their whole efforts; and, not much to the credit of Revolutionary patriotism, such deficiency was too often ascribable to the seductive allurements of privateering.

An act of the General Assembly in May, 1782, directed that body to appoint a board of three commissioners to superintend and provide for the defense and protection of the trade and commerce in the Chesapeake Bay, and placed it under the Governor and Council, who had the right to fill its vacancies. The board was ordered to coöperate with Maryland, and in case of a dispute with the Maryland officers it was given power to settle it. It was directed in October,



1782, to hold a court to consist of not less than three experienced naval officers, for the purpose of inquiring into the fitness of the personnel of the navy, with a view to pruning off the unfit. It is probable that the Board of Commissioners had charge of the navy, for the most part, until June, 1783, when Virginia disposed of her fleet.

In South Carolina naval affairs were, from October, 1775, until March 26, 1776, in the hands of the Provincial Congress and the Council of Safety. During this period the former body appointed a commissary of stores for the naval department, adopted a list of naval rules and regulations, and obtained and equipped the schooner *Defense* and the ship *Prosper*, twenty guns; while the Council of Safety looked out for minor details and conducted the naval defense of Charleston in October and November, 1775, in which the *Defense*, having on board thirty-five State marines, played a conspicuous part. Under the new constitution, which went into effect March 26, 1776, the President and the Privy Council became the State Executive.

The naval preparation of the State soon demanded the appointment of proper persons, "particularly to direct and superintend the same." Accordingly, October 8, 1776, an act was passed creating a Board of Naval Commissioners, consisting of seven persons. This board was charged with the building, hiring, or buying of all naval vessels, and the arming, outfitting, and provisioning of the same, and with the construction of rope walks and shipyards. Further, the board was authorized to audit the naval accounts, recommend officers, fill vacancies temporarily, inform itself as to the state of the navy, and report the same to the Legislature. In addition to its strictly naval duties, it directed the carrying of merchandise, the transporting of troops, and the conveying of stores to the garrisons. Probably the most engrossing duty of the board was the purchase of naval supplies of various sorts—salted beef and pork, bread, pitch, tar, turpentine and tallow, duck, cordage, and spars.

The appointment of naval officers was vested in the Legislature, and during its recess in the President. The assent

of the President and the Privy Council was necessary to the removal of an officer. The question whether the Commissioners had the right to order the vessels on a cruise, the most important administrative act of a naval office, was soon raised, and the President and Privy Council unanimously decided that this was a function of their own.

The board at its first meeting organized by electing as chairman Edward Blake, one of their members and former commissary of stores for the navy department. It also elected a clerk, paid at the rate of fourteen thousand pounds currency a year. At first a majority constituted a quorum, which later became so difficult to secure that two more Commissioners were appointed August 23, 1777, making nine members, any three of whom, it was now ordered, should be sufficient for business.

The act of October 8, 1776, establishing the naval board, was to continue in effect two years. On October 9, 1778, it was revived and continued one year longer, and from thence to the end of the Legislature then sitting. As no further mention is made of the board in Cooper's "Statutes at Large of South Carolina," it is highly probable that it came to an end in the autumn of 1779.

By October, 1776, South Carolina's navy numbered four small vessels, the ship *Prosper* and three schooners (the *Defense*, *Comet*, and *Beaufort*). The navy board added another vessel and built the *Hornet*, a brig of fourteen guns. These vessels successfully avoided the British men-of-war, and on short cruises captured several prizes. In 1777 the State, encouraged by the success of the Continental frigate *Randolph*, which brought into Charleston four rich prizes after a cruise of eight days, took into the public service the ship *General Moultrie*, eighteen guns, and the brigs *Polly*, sixteen guns, and *Fair American*, fourteen guns. Against the judgment of the best military opinion, the President and Council sent these three vessels and the *Notre Dame*, sixteen guns, of the State fleet, with the *Randolph*, thirty-six guns, all under the command of Capt. Biddle, of the Continental navy, on a cruise against three British men-

of-war which infested the South Carolina coast. The expedition was a failure. To the east of the Barbadoes, in an encounter with the British ship *Yarmouth*,<sup>1</sup> sixty-four guns, the *Randolph* blew up, killing Capt. Ioor, fifty South Carolina marines, and all others on board, except two or three men picked up by the *Yarmouth*. The rest of the fleet made their way home in safety.

Subsequently a plan for obtaining three frigates from Europe was devised, three captains appointed, and Alexander Gillon, an influential merchant of Charleston, made commodore of the proposed fleet. Commodore Gillon went to Europe, but succeeded in doing no more than renting, for one-fourth of her prizes, a large frigate, equal to a seventy-four gun ship, of the Chevalier Luxembourg. This vessel was originally the *Indien*, one of the heaviest single-deck frigates which had been built up to that time, and had been constructed at Amsterdam under the direction of the American Commissioners at Paris. Commodore Gillon engaged two hundred and eighty marines and sixty-nine seamen to man the frigate, in the pay of South Carolina, and after innumerable difficulties got the vessel cruising in the latter part of 1781. She captured several prizes, and finally, after assisting in an expedition against the Bahama Islands in May, 1782, turned up at Philadelphia. After refitting she put to sea and was immediately captured, not without some reflection upon the conduct of Capt. Joiner, her new commander. The expense to South Carolina, connected with this vessel, has been put as high as five hundred thousand dollars. Naval experience came dear in all the States during Revolutionary times.

The initial step in the naval business was taken in North Carolina December 21, 1775, when three small cruisers were ordered to be built. During 1776-78 her navy numbered some four or five vessels, which were, for the most part, half manned and poorly equipped, and accomplished little. In December, 1777, the State ordered one vessel to be sold and two others to be devoted to purposes of trade, one of which latter was, in April, 1778, ordered to be disposed of. In 1777

some galleys were fitted out at the joint expense of Virginia and North Carolina.

The Provincial Congress of North Carolina, and during its recess the Council of Safety, administered naval affairs until December 23, 1777, when they devolved under the new constitution upon the Governor and Council. These bodies were chiefly assisted by three standing Boards of Commissioners, located at as many seaports: one at Cape Fear, consisting of five members; one at Newbern, eight members; and one at Edenton, six members. A majority of the membership of each board constituted a quorum; a later statute made three members sufficient for business in the Newbern Board. Each board was directed to purchase, man, arm, and victual a vessel. At times other Boards of Commissioners were appointed for special purposes, such as that of selling a vessel or "inquiring into the state of the galleys at the South Quay."

When, in October, 1779, the Continental Congress placed its department of naval administration in the hands of a Board of Admiralty, the experiences of Virginia and South Carolina, with similar boards, were no doubt drawn upon. The action of Virginia in May, 1780, in doing away with her many-headed executives for single-headed ones was soon followed by the Continental Congress with like changes in its administrative organs; and to the unfortunate experiences in executive commissions of both the State and central governments may be directly traced the selection of single cabinet officers under the constitution.

The agricultural South, a stranger to the "habit of the sea," without a nursery upon which to draw for seamen, such as had New England in its fishing fleet of the Grand Banks, bravely attempted to meet the sudden exigency of a naval defense. If her success under State auspices was indifferent, it was common to her sister States to the northward, and was relieved by the better fortunes of her privateers, which class of vessels, north as well as south, won many laurels during the Revolution. Private enterprise everywhere drew off the best nautical blood, for these were the days when governments were weak and individual initiative was strong.

C. O. PAULLIN.